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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT SHUTS DOWN BEMBA-OWNED RADIO AND
TELEVISION STATIONS

REF: KINSHASA 63 (NOTAL)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Authorities in Kinshasa shut down two television stations and a radio station owned by Vice President Bemba. These stations aired comments made by an ousted former minister, which were critical of President Kabila. This action comes during a period of heightened tension between Bemba and Kabila over power-sharing in the transitional government and the recent suspension of a minister close to Bemba. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The Congolese Minister of Press and Information (and Kabila ally), Henri Mova Sakanyi, announced on the evening of January 18 the suspension of broadcasting by Canal Kin Television (CKTV), Canal Congo Television (CCTV) and Radio Liberte Kinshasa. All these stations are owned by Bemba. Sakanyi denounced the "persistent excesses" of the Congolese media. Specifically, these stations were closed for broadcasting an interview with former Minister of Transportation Joseph Olengankoy in which Olengankoy accused President Kabila of corruption and embezzlement. He also accused Kabila's sister Janet of corruption. The Minister characterized these accusations as "outrageous" and added: "the person of the Chief of State is sacred as it embodies the nation. Consequently, all attacks against the Chief of State through the media will be rigorously sanctioned in conformity with legislation in force in the DRC."

¶3. (SBU) The closures also reflect ongoing tension between Kabila and Bemba. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Marie-Ange Lukiana, Deputy Secretary-General of the PPRD (People's Party for Reconstruction and Development, closely associated with Kabila) on January 13 publicly characterized Bemba's stations as "hate media" and threatened to "have them silenced." This was provoked by Bemba's stations broadcasting pictures of police shooting at demonstrators during the January 10 protests (reftel). Other high PPRD officials have accused these stations of being mouthpieces expressing the MLC's most virulent anti-Kabila sentiments.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: MONUC and MLC sources told us there was a tense standoff the evening of January 19 between the members of the Presidential Guard and GSSP and Bemba's forces at one or more of these stations. There were also reports of a confrontation the same evening between Kabila's and Bemba's forces at the funeral of the mother-in-law of Congo/Brazzaville President Sassou which both Bemba and Kabila attended. Though a result of current tensions between Kabila and Bemba, the closure of the media outlets also reflects an apparently intensifying effort by the GDRC, and specifically the Kabila/PPRD faction, to exert greater control over the Congolese media. END COMMENT.

¶5. (U) Bujumbura minimize considered.

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